

# Washington State Patrol Media Release

**Chief John R. Batiste**

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Captain Jeff DeVere  
Government and Media Relations  
(360) 753-5299 – office  
(360) 753-5469 – fax  
<http://www.wsp.wa.gov>

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**Contact(s): Government and Media Relations (360) 753-5299**

## **Stiffer Penalties for Unsecured Loads**

**OLYMPIA** – Failure to secure a vehicle's load is tantamount to endangering other motorists' lives and now can cost motorists a bigger fine than before.

A new law that increases the penalties associated with unsecured loads went into effect July 27. Substitute House Bill 1478 was passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Christine Gregoire earlier this spring. The legislation changes the litter laws **and** raises the price you will pay if you receive a ticket for an unsecured load.

As before, failure to secure a load is a traffic violation and carries a \$194 fine. The bill created two additional categories of unsecured loads. Failure to secure a load and causing bodily injury is a gross misdemeanor and can carry a fine up to \$5,000 and/or up to one year's jail time. Failure to secure a load in cases involving property damage is a misdemeanor and can carry fines up to \$1,000 and/or up to 90 days' jail time.

Several high-profile accidents involving unsecured loads, including the one that blinded Maria Federici of Renton, prompted government officials to take action.

Washington State Department of Transportation statistics show an average of 365 collisions each year involving vehicles striking objects or debris in the road. A recent AAA Traffic Safety Foundation report stated that there are 25,000 accidents involving road debris in North America each year – nearly 100 of them fatal.

To help educate the public about this danger, the state Department of Ecology, in partnership with Washington State Patrol, has developed a video with real stories about how litter can hurt people and how to prevent such incidents. The video can be viewed online at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/litter/>.

The state's "litter and it will hurt" campaign is based on research showing that the best way to get people to stop littering is to make them aware of the consequences. The real-world examples used in the "secure your load" materials demonstrate exactly how "litter will hurt" in attempt to grab people's attention and persuade them to prevent litter.

"Littering is dangerous which is why we take these violations very seriously," said Chief John R. Batiste. "The WSP will continue to educate drivers on the importance of securing their loads."

"Research with people who admit to littering indicated that stiff fines were a deterrent," said Megan Warfield, litter programs coordinator with the state Department of Ecology. "If they don't care about the health, environmental or safety costs, we hope getting a ticket will convince those who litter to change their behavior."

The Washington State Patrol and other law enforcement agencies have supported the campaign through enforcement efforts. In 2004, WSP troopers made 3,639 litter-related contacts where either a ticket or warning was issued.

**More information about litter fines can be found on the litter Web site:**

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/litter/fines.html>

**For more information on the “Litter and It Will Hurt” campaign please visit:**

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/litter/campaign.html>

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